

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1381

INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: A CALL TO ARMS OR A HARBINGER OF DOOM?

1. SUMMARY: PUBLIC OPINION POLL RELEASED JUNE 20 BY RADIO CANADA INDICATES SUPPORT FOR P.Q. HAS SUNK TO 33 PERCENT. THIS IS LOWEST POINT SINCE PARTY'S ELECTION. CONVERSELY, QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY FORTUNES APPEAR BE WAXING WITH 40 PERCENT SUPPORT. POLL FURTHER INDICATES OPPOSITION TO SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION REMAINS STRONG AT 53 PERCENT WITH 33 PERCENT FAVORING AND 14 PERCENT UNDECIDED. FEDERAL ALSO APPEAR TO BE MAINTAINING THEIR DOMINANCE IN QUEBEC. CONSERVATIVES HAVE GAINED marginally AT EXPENSE OF CREDITISTES WHO MAY BE ON WAY TO ELECTORAL EXTINCTION. LUCKY IN POLITICS IF NOT IN LOVE, PIERRE TRUDEAU CONTINUES BE QUEBEC'S OVERWHELMING CHOICE FOR FEDERAL LEADERSHIP. FINALLY, MANY QUEBEC VOTERS CLAIM SEE NOTHING INCONSISTENT IN VOTING LIBERAL IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS AND P.Q. PROVINCIALLY. IN SOME CIRCLES THIS MIGHT BE CALLED HEDGING A BET. END SUMMARY.

2. POLL RELEASED YESTERDAY (JUNE 20) BY RADIO CANADA TENDS

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CONFIRM TRENDS EARLIER REPORTED IN QUEBEC 0105. VOTER SUPPORT FOR P.Q. HAS REPORTEDLY FURTHER SLIPPED TO SURPRISING LOW OF 33 PERCENT AFTER HAVING REACHED ZENITH OF 50 PERCENT SHORTLY AFTER NOVEMBER 15, 1975 ELECTION. LIBERALS, ON OTHER HAND, HAVE REGAINED LOST GROUND WITH SUPPORT NOW REACHING 40 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED. UNION NATIONAL MAY AGAIN BE DESTINED TO POLITICAL INSIGNIFICANCE WITH ONLY 8 PERCENT

SUPPORT AFTER GAINING 19 PERCENT VOTE UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES DURING LAST ELECTION.

3. FEDERAL LIBERALS HAVE ALSO FARED WELL IN QUEBEC POLLING. SOME 55 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED SAID THEY WOULD VOTE FOR LIBERAL CANDIDATES IF THERE WERE AN ELECTION TODAY. ONLY 18 PERCENT EXPRESSED URGE TO VOTE FOR CONSERVATIVES, WHILE SOCIAL CREDIT WAS REDUCED TO ONLY 3.5 PERCENT . WITH SUCH COMMANDING SUPPORT, LIBERALS SEEM ASSURED OF CONTINUING THEIR DOMINANCE IN QUEBEC. CONSERVATIVES HAVE MADE SOME MARGINAL ADVANCE, PRESUMABLY AT EXPENSE OF CREDITISTES. LATER WOULD LOSE VIRTUALLY ALL SEATS THEY PRESENTLY HOLD IN QUEBEC, IF THIS POLL WERE AN ELECTION.

4. CLAUDE RYAN SURPRISED MANY OBSERVERS BY LEADING BOTH LEVESQUE AND TRUDEAU AS POLITICAL LEADER "WHO BEST REFLECTS QUEBECOIS ASPIRATIONS." HE WAS NAME D AS FIRST CHOICE BY 31 PERCENT OF RESPONDANTS WHILE LEVESQUE RECEIVED 30 PERCENT AND TRUDEAU 24 PERCENT. OUTSIDER, JOE CLARK, TRAILED WITH ONLY 4 PERCENT. WHILE RYAN HELD NARROW OVERALL LEAD IN POPULARITY POLL, LARGELY ON STRENGTH O F HEAVY NON-FRANCO-PHONE SUPPORT, LEVESQUE WAS GIVEN HONORS BY 40 PERCENT OF FRANCOPHONE RESPONDANTS. ALTHOUGH TRAILING TWO OTHER QUEBEC LEADERS IN COMPARATIVE POPULARITY, TRUDEAU WAS GIVEN RESOUNDING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE AS FEDERAL LEADER. HE WAS FIRST CHOICE FOR CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER OF 59 PERCENT OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESPONDANTS. A PREFERENCE WAS INDICATED FOR JOE CLARK BY ONLY 18 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED. SOME 72 PERCENT OF RESPONDANTS EXPRESSED OPINION THAT TRUDEAU SHOULD NOT RESIGN AS LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA.

5. IN EXPRESSING OPINION ON CONSTITUTIONAL OPTIONS, 44 PERCENT FAVORED REVISED FEDERALISM, 21 PERCENT SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION, 17 PERCENT STATUS QUO, 8 PERCENT INDEPENDENCE AND 10 PERCENT EXPRESSED NO OPINION. TURNING QUESTION AROUND, THOSE POLLED WERE ASKED TO WHICH OPTION THEY WERE DISPOSED LEAST FAVORABLY. AS IN PREVIOUS POLLS, A WHOPPING 69 PERCENT NAMED INDEPENDENCE. ASKED DIRECTLY WHETHER THEY WOULD VOTE FOR OR AGAINST A PROPOSITION IN A REFERENDUM CALLING FOR A POLITICALLY INDEPENDENT QUEBEC IN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA? , A MAJORITY OF 53 PERCENT SAID THEY WOULD VOTE AGAINST, 33 PERCENT WOULD VOTE FOR AND 14 PERCENT WERE

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UNDECIDED. AMONG FRANCOPHONES WHO RESPONDED TO QUESTION, 54 PERCENT WERE AGAINST AND 46 PERCENT WERE FOR SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION AS DEFINED BY QUESTIONER. IN MORE NUANCED QUESTION, RESPONDANTS WERE ASKED: IF THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC ASKED YOU "TO ACCORD IT A MANDATE TO NEGOTIATE A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT, WOULD YOU ACCORD IT SUCH A MANDATE? SOME 56 PERCENT RESPONDED YES, 26 PERCENT SAID NO AND 18 PERCENT WERE UNDECIDED. A MAJORITY OF BOTH FRANCOPHONES (71 PERCENT) AND NON-FRANCOPHONES (59 PERCENT) FAVORED SUCH A MANDATE. PRESUMABLY, IT WAS AMBIGUOUS ENOUGH TO GAIN SUPPORT FROM AMONG THOSE WHO WOULD SUPPORT A REVISED FEDERALISM AS WELL AS SOME OF THOSE WHO FAVOR SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION.

6. THE RADIO CANADA POLL INDICATES THAT POPULAR PERCEPTION OF HOW THINGS ARE GOING GENERALLY IN QUEBEC HAS EASED CONSIDERABLY SINCE 69 PERCENT RESPONDED "BADLY" LAST FEBRUARY. LATEST POLLING INDICATES SOME 53 PERCENT OF RESPONDANTS BELIEVE "THINGS ARE NOT GOING VERY WELL" OR "NOT WELL AT ALL" IN QUEBEC SOCIETY AS OPPOSED TO 45 PERCENT WHO BELIEVE THINGS ARE GOING "WELL" OR "VERY WELL." THERE ARE NOW 51 PERCENT OF RESPONDANTS DISSATISFIED WITH GOQ AS OPPOSED TO 46 PERCENT
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SATISFIED. DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS ALMOST EXACT REVERSE. SOME 52 PERCENT EXPRESSED SATISFACTION, WHILE 44 PERCENT SAID THEY WERE NOT SATISFIED. ASKED WHICH SIDE WAS RIGHT IN SALES TAX QUARREL, 44 PERCENT SAID QUEBEC, 22 PERCENT CANADA, 7 PERCENT BOTH, 8 PERCENT NEITHER, AND

19 PERCENT WERE UNDECIDED. UNEMPLOYMENT WAS SEEN BY
51 PERCENT AS MOST TROUBLING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

7. COMMENT: OBSERVERS WITH WHOM I HAVE DISCUSSED POLL
RESULT ARE SURPRISED AT THE LOW POINT SUPPORT FOR THE
PQ HAS REACHED. MCGILL POLLSTER, MAURICE PINARD, COMMENTED
TO ME THAT HE NEVER EXPECTED THE FIGURE TO GO BELOW
35 PERCENT BEFORE IT "BOTTOMED OUT." RESPECTED
LAVAL UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCIENTIST, VINCENT LEMIEUX, TOLD ME
THAT HE BELIEVED BEFORE POLL RESULT ANNOUNCED THAT PQ
FORTUNES HAD BEGUN TO WAX AS RESULT OF FAVORABLE
IMPRESSION MADE ON QUEBEC PUBLIC BY PARIZEAU'S HANDLING OF
SALES TAX DISPUTE. NEITHER OF THESE PROFESSIONALS DOUBT
HONESTLY OF THIS POLL. BOTH AGREED THAT EDOUARD CLOUTIER OF
MONTREAL UNIVERSITY, WHO HELPED CONDUCT POLL, IS HARDLY LIKELY
RIG POLL IN FAVOR OF LIBERALS SINCE HE IS A PQ SUPPORTER.
FACT THAT SUPPORT FOR SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION OPTION HAS
FAILED TO GROW SURPRISED FEW. PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINED
SUPPORT FOR TRUDEAU AND GROWING SUPPORT FOR RYAN WERE CONFIRMED BY
POLL. FACT THAT QUEBECOIS ARE CONFUSED BY SOVEREIGNTY-
ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN NO MYSTERY HERE. PQ ITSELF HAS YET TO
SETTLE ON AGREED DEFINITION OF THEIR PREFERRED OPTION AND
STATEMENTS BY LEADERS ON THE SUBJECT ARE MASTERPIECES
IN AMBIGUITY. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS BEING DRAWN IN QUEBEC
FROM POLL RESULTS ARE: 1) PQ IS STILL IN DEEP ELECTORAL
TROUBLE; 2) REFERENDUM CAN ONLY BE WON BY USE OF AMBIGUOUS
QUESTION; 3) PROVINCIAL LIBERALS UNDER RYAN'S LEADERSHIP
ARE WELL ON WAY TO RECLAIMING PORTION OF THEIR
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TRADITIONAL CLIENTELE WHICH DEFECTED TO UNION NATIONAL
DURING LAST ELECTION; AND 4) FEDERAL LIBERAL'S HOLD ON
QUEBEC ELECTORATE APPEARS NOT TO BE THREATENED; AND
5) TRUDEAU IS STILL QUEBEC'S PREFERRED FEDERAL LEADER.
IF PQ SUPPORTERS NEEDED ANY FURTHER INDUCEMENT TO PUT FORTH
BEST EFFORTS IN JUST LAUNCHED PRE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN, THEY NOW HAVE
IT.
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